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AUTHOR Hattlestad, Neil W.
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ABSTRACT

Two major issues in inservice teacher education are: (1) Who is responsible for teaching these professional education courses?; and (2) Are these courses worthy of graduate credit? College faculty members generally agree that institutions of higher learning are obligated to assist practitioners, but universities have been reluctant to offer courses that address the immediate needs of teachers. The result is that professional organizations and school districts have taken the initiative to develop their own inservice delivery systems. However, these agencies cannot match the number and diversity of resources that universities can provide, making the university the most logical center for offering continuing education experiences. The question of extending credit for continuing education courses has arisen because some programs have been criticized as deficient in library resources, entrance requirements, and control over teaching staff. Universities must also either relax standards to accommodate some practitioners or emphasize service at the expense of graduate programs. The solution for some universities has been to create a separate continuing education department, but this approach has also had problems. Elimination of a masters' thesis requirement, while retaining emphasis on research skills, is an option. One university is offering graduates and undergraduates a variety of learning situations (workshops, seminars, mini-courses, etc.) with a choice of grading and credit arrangements. Regardless of the instructional method that is adopted, the courses should address the immediate problems of practitioners and should be based on students and faculty sharing knowledge and experience. (FG)

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THE UNIVERSITY'S RESPONSIBILITY IN OFFERING CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR PROFESSIONALS - CAN GRADUATE CREDIT BE JUSTIFIED?

Neil W. Hattlestad, Ed.D.
Chairperson, Department of Physical Education
Professor of Physical Education
Sam Houston State University

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THE UNIVERSITY'S RESPONSIBILITY IN OFFERING CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR PROFESSIONALS - CAN GRADUATE CREDIT BE JUSTIFIED?

Within the past decade there has been a dramatic increase in the number of continuing education opportunities for elementary and secondary teachers. Some of the major factors which have precipitated this development include: (1) reduced teacher mobility; (2) changing societal needs and interests; and (3) the knowledge explosion. Recent developments such as the passage of Title IX and Public Law 94-142, and the emphasis on individualizing and humanizing instruction have added to the complexities of teaching. Practitioners have discovered that they are moving toward professional obsolescence shortly after receiving their degrees. One trend which demonstrates the validity of this conclusion, may be observed in the growing number of states where permanent certification of teachers is being challenged.

While the return to the classroom by larger and larger numbers of practitioners is encouraging, two major issues have emerged as a consequence. First, who is responsible for the teaching of continuing education courses, and secondly, are they worthy of graduate credit? Although these questions are related, their resolution calls for a careful examination of each.

Who Will Teach Continuing Education?

Historically, the teaching of both pre-service and in-service (continuing) education was the exclusive role of the universities. More recently, however, there has been a significant shift, with the professional associations and local school districts assuming a greater share of the responsibility. Other agencies which are also emerging as continuing education providers are the regional

educational resource (service) centers, private contractors, and state departments of instruction.

Fallon (1978) has suggested that these developments have led to a series of conflicts between the school districts, professional associations, and the universities. The universities have often been reluctant to offer courses which address the immediate problems faced by practitioners. This has prompted some administrators and educators in the local school districts to conclude that the university is no longer interested in assisting them in seeking solutions to their problems. Evidence to support this notion was offered by Fallon (1978:36) when he reported that, "In several states professional associations and local school districts have developed their own continuing education delivery system frequently under the approval of state departments of instruction."

Faculty members in our colleges and universities generally agree that the university is obligated to assist practitioners in the resolution of their problems. This attitude is clearly demonstrated each year as large numbers of university faculty members serve as clinicians during in-service meetings conducted by the local school districts.

With faculty demonstrating their willingness to help, why is the university criticized for being so insensitive to the needs of the local schools by its failure to offer "practical" continuing education courses? It should be noted that some universities have attempted to meet these needs by making graduate degree requirements more flexible, and by providing non-credit offerings. It is recognized, however, that there have been problems associated with these developments. Non-credit offerings often hold little appeal for practitioners because most school boards still insist that to be eligible for salary increments, one must complete courses which carry graduate credit. University

administrators often oppose non-credit offerings since they do not provide the necessary student credit hour production so vital to the maintenance of faculty and budgets. Graduate faculty dislike the added flexibility in degree requirements because it can lead to the erosion of quality in their programs. Zeigler and Paton (1973:103) provided one of the more succinct explanations of this delemma when they suggested that,

> Local and regional needs must be served by universities within those geographical areas, but no one will ultimately thank an institution that becomes a diploma mill for tired teachers and coaches.

Who will teach continuing education? Although several agencies have a contribution to make, the university must be regarded as the most logical center for the provision of continuing education experiences. Those who disagree with this conclusion might reconsider upon review of the definition of a university developed by Eason (1978:26). She describes the university as ...

> ... a community of learners - faculty and students engaged in collaborative endeavors, exploring knowledge, conducting research and scholarship, and sharing and applying knowledge to various settings for the benefit of society.

No other continuing education agency can match the institutions of higher learning with respect to the number and diversity of resources which they can provide. The greater issue which must be addressed is the question of the granting of credit for enrollment in continuing education courses.

Can Graduate Credit Be Justified?

To determine whether graduate credit can be granted for a professional continuing education course, one must first examine the criteria which distinguish between undergraduate and graduate level work. Specific courses which form the core of all master's programs will vary with each discipline. Certain offerings which should form a part of all core requirements are research methods (including statistics) and philosophy. In the area of physical education, for example, Ziegler and Paton (1973:103) have suggested that a core of 12 to 15 hours should include offerings in research, statistics, history, philosophy, and the science of human motor behavior.

There are those who believe that the gap between undergraduate and graduate study is steadily decreasing. Mayhew and Ford (1974:99), for example, have described the master's degree as a level of achievement which, "... no longer implies any particular research competency, but is increasingly becoming an extension of undergraduate programs." While it is true that present day graduate degree programs are more flexible, I do not believe that master's level programs have slipped to the depths which these writers have described.

The underlying assumption of most faculty who oppose the granting of graduate credit for continuing education courses is that they believe these offerings are inferior. This view is supported by the rationale that many of these courses are deficient in terms of: (1) library and computer resources; (2) entrance requirements; and (3) controls over the faculty who are allowed to teach. Mand (1976:34) opposed this view when he stated that, "Continued adherence to a classical model of graduate education may eventually eliminate society's need for such colleges." In an earlier paper (1975:183) he was even more specific in his criticism when he suggested that,

> Frequently, master's programs are mini preparations for doctoral programs. The courses are often research oriented, and generally represent a preparation for some future good rather than a solution to the here and now of classroom problems.

Although some practitioners may view the effort to preserve the "sanctity" of graduate study as clear evidence of insensitivity to their problems, they must also recognize the concerns of the graduate faculty. Selling the idea of a graduate program to a board of trustees is no easy task. An erosion in the quality of programs as demonstrated by a reduction in achievement of students on standardized tests and the existence of inferior research, can lead to the withdrawal of support for those programs. If research is to flourish, productive grantsmanship is essential. Retention of outstanding faculty who are successful in attracting grants, will be more difficult if there is a reduction in the quality of students and offerings within a given graduate program.

It would therefore appear that the universities find themselves in a "catch-22" situation. If they adhere to a regid set of standards in the interest of maintaining quality, they will alienate regional practitioners. On the other hand, if the choice is made to emphasize service at the expense of the graduate programs, they may find it difficult to retain the services of outstanding teacher-researchers.

Is There A Satisfactory Solution?

Several universities have attempted to address the needs of practitioners through the creation of a separate division for continuing education. This has

not resolved the problem from the perspective of university administrators, however, because the division of continuing education is reimbursed for student credit hours generated rather than the individual departments. Lambart (1978:23) indicated that, " Throughout the country continuing education divisions and extension services seem to be in poor health, being neither well-supported nor well-accepted." She believes that problems in persuading professors to teach courses are a major shortcoming of this approach.

Elimination of the thesis requirement constituted one of the first attempts to make master's degree programs more relevant for the practitioner. I fully support this development, but am very opposed to the elimination of the thesis investigation as an option for the research-oriented student. It is my belief that every department offering a graduate degree must provide the opportunity for students to conduct a thesis investigation. This view is in conflict with that held by Zeigler and Paton (1973) who have suggested that through state-wide planning, some institutions would provide research oriented degrees requiring a thesis, and others would provide only a non-thesis option. While this approach would enable a department to attract a solid core of research-oriented faculty, it would be very difficult for those departments limited to the non-thesis option to retain faculty with an active interest in research. In my judgment, every department that offers a master's degree should have at least three members of its faculty who conduct research investigations on a regular basis. The graduate of a non-thesis program has an obligation to become an intelligent consumer of research findings, and must possess problem-solving skills. This will be accomplished most effectively if that individual is exposed to faculty members actively engaged in the investigative process.

A significant departure from past attempts to meet the needs of practitioners while maintaining the integrity of the graduate program has been proposed

within the College of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance at Temple University. Leahy (1978) reported that in this approach, a variety of seminars, workshops, and mini-courses would be offered to full-time graduate students as well as transient continuing education students. Each offering would be developed following a needs assessment with the focus on resolution of problems which confront practitioners. The participant would decide whether he or she chooses to contract for credit, with three possible levels of participation. These include: (1) graduate credit with the traditional five letter grade system; (2) in-service credit, graded on a pass-fail basis, and sufficiently rigorous to meet state and local certification standards; and (3) the attainment of a continuing education unit (CEU), which is based solely on attendance. Leahy (1978) reported that he and his colleagues had encountered resistance from all sides including the University, in-service councils, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education, in securing approval for the adoption of this approach. In a recent conversation with Leahy (1981), he indicated that since the State Department of Education has instituted its own continuing education delivery system, he and his colleagues have made very limited progress in providing courses (other than those for graduate credit) for practitioners. Although this plan has several positive features, I find it difficult to support the acceptance of a course in which the only criteria for accomplishment is attendance. Although evaluation of performance in workshops possess some unique problems, an examination which covers general content areas can be administered. In the case of an internship, participants may be asked to maintain a daily log and to provide a verbal or written report at the conclusion of this experience.

Obviously, no single solution will be satisfactory to all. Agencies who certify practitioners are to be applauded for adherence to criteria which

require graduate credit for those seeking permanent certification. On the other hand, it must be realized that there are also those effective practitioners who cannot meet graduate school standards. If the universities are to assume the major responsibility for continuing professional education, courses they offer should address the immediate problems of practitioners. To do this, members of the graduate faculty must be willing to listen to elementary and secondary teachers, and to cooperatively assist them in seeking solutions to the problems they face. This change of attitude was aptly described by Barrette (1978:32) when he suggested that graduate faculty should be ...

> ... refocusing the educational process from one which is based on students struggling to close the knowledge gap created by the escalating expertise of one professor or another, to one which is based on students and professors sharing knowledge and experience; together analyzing, evaluating and synthesizing information in an effort to more effectively translate knowledge and theory into practice.

A cursory review of the summer offerings of many of our universities will reveal that there is an increased number of offerings which address such issues as moving toward compliance with Public Law 94-142 and Title IX. I believe that the student pursuing a master's degree could be allowed to apply a given number of these courses toward degree requirements. Six semester credit hours would seem a reasonable number of continuing education courses which could be applied toward the master's degree. Those not seeking a master's degree could periodically enroll in continuing education classes so as to remain in compliance with state certification standards. The abolition of the granting of a permanent teaching certificate should also be given serious

consideration. Even master's and doctoral degree holders should have incentives which cause them to periodically update their knowledge. This is expected in the field of medicine through the continuing education unit system - why not in education?

There is no agency that can serve the continuing education needs of practitioners as well as our institutions of higher learning. If those of us who determine graduate school policy are willing to listen to our constituents and institute the necessary reforms, we can fulfill our responsibilities to practitioners while maintaining the highest possible level of quality in our graduate programs.

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